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Government of the District of Columbia



Office of the City Administrator

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Testimony of  
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Interim City Administrator and  
Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice

***Public Hearing on Bill 16-907, the “Comprehensive  
Homicide Elimination Strategy Task Force Act of 2006”***

Committee on the Judiciary  
Phil Mendelson, Chair  
Council of the District of Columbia

November 29, 2006

Room 500  
John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004  
10:00 A.M.

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Good morning Chairperson Mendelson and members of the Committee on the Judiciary. I am Edward Reiskin, Interim City Administrator and Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today in support of Bill 16-709, the Comprehensive Homicide Elimination Strategy Task Force Act of 2006. A copy of my testimony is posted on my website at <http://dmprsj.dc.gov>.

First, I want to state that any effort that brings to bear new ideas to reduce the toll of violence in the District is welcome. After all, it took new ideas, new technologies, and new partnerships to bring down the number of murders in DC from nearly 400 ten short years ago to the levels we experience today. At the end of December, we fully expect 2006 to be the third consecutive year that the District has recorded fewer than 200 homicides.

Yet for all the good work we are doing, the loss of every life to violence exposes a breakdown in our mutual responsibilities to ensure that every District resident is safe from crime and the fear of crime. As Chief Ramsey has often said, there is no reason why there should be more than 100 homicides per year in the District. Others advocate for zero. We all agree that the number of people dying on our streets each year is unacceptable. But the police alone cannot make this happen. The government alone cannot make this happen. And the District is certainly not alone in searching for the most effective strategy.

Cities across the country are grappling with a troubling rise in violent crime. When mayors and police chiefs from more than 50 cities and counties gathered in DC this summer for the National Violent Crime Summit, one constant refrain was that crime is at a tipping point. Cities like Cincinnati, Philadelphia, and Orlando are reporting record numbers of homicides.<sup>1</sup> And to put our numbers into context, despite our 50% decrease over ten years, DC continues to record more murders per capita than many other major U.S. cities, including New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the need to improve our strategies is clear. The proposed task force, because its members are to be drawn from many stakeholder groups that have not traditionally been at the table in developing comprehensive homicide reduction strategies, holds great potential. I do, however, want to caution that such a large and diverse group, without a clear mandate and only a year to produce recommendations on this complex subject, will need significant support from the next Administration as well as the Council.

I would like to also suggest that the proposed task force review existing strategy documents and recent studies and evaluations to quickly examine at the outset some of our current initiatives that have been credited with having achieved positive outcomes.

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<sup>1</sup> Klein, Allison, "Police Chiefs Cite Youths in Crime Rise, Call for More Federal Funds," Washington Post, August 31, 2006, Page A13.

<sup>2</sup> 2005 FBI Uniform Crime Report, Actual Reported Crimes and Population, Murders per 100,000 People: Baltimore (42), DC (35.4), Philadelphia (25.6), Chicago (15.6), Los Angeles (12.6), New York (6.6)

To start, the March 2005 Homicide Reduction Strategy for the District of Columbia, jointly produced by MPD, the United States Attorney's Office, the Office of the Attorney General for the District of Columbia, and our federal criminal justice partners lays out a five-pronged strategy for addressing our consistently high murder rate through suppression, deterrence, intervention, investigation, and prosecution. A copy can be found on MPD's website at <http://mpdc.dc.gov>. This strategy, in concert with better known initiatives like hot spots, Weed and Seed, and Project Safe Neighborhoods, follows a model of focus and coordination to saturate resources in our most challenged neighborhoods to reduce violent crime. Likewise, MPD's October 2006 Report on Juvenile and Adult Homicide in the District of Columbia should be recommended reading, along with the recent independent evaluation of the Gang Intervention Partnership. Both can also be found on MPD's website.

Juvenile victims of homicide, as well as youth participation in violent crime, have been the focus of the Mayor's Effective Youth Development Strategy. With the tremendous support of the Council, the youth development strategy received \$7 million to continue implementation of the strategy's various initiatives in FY07. Deputy Mayor Brenda Donald Walker and I have taken steps to institutionalize these initiatives to ensure continuity into the next Administration. It is important that the proposed task force has knowledge of these programs, which include the Partnership for Success, a high-risk youth intervention program for youth in the custody of DYRS or under the supervision of Court Social Services, the Violence Intervention Partnership, a program in Wards 7 and 8 modeled on the successful Gang Intervention Partnership in Ward 1, the Health Information Response Team initiative that aims to analyze the injury data for youth to identify risk factors that will assist the government in targeting resources and programming, and the Truancy Task Force.

Lastly, although not explicitly mentioned in the legislation, I would recommend that illegal guns receive primary focus in developing this comprehensive strategy. It is news to no one that most murders in DC are carried out with a gun. In early 2007 DC will be hosting a follow up to Mayor Bloomberg's and Mayor Menino's summit held in New York City this past April to develop a common urban strategy to combat illegal guns. It will benefit future potential task force members to take part in this event.

In closing, thank you for this opportunity to present testimony today on Bill 16-907, the Comprehensive Homicide Elimination Strategy Task Force Act of 2006. I want to thank the committee for its work during this Council period to improve public safety in the District and I look forward to hearing the testimony from the public witnesses today. The combined energies of those in the room this morning representing the community have already done so much to make DC a safer place and their expertise is invaluable. I am now available for any questions that you may have.